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**From Public Library Prankster to Playwright:**

**Joe Orton and Postwar Britain's Nanny State**

[draft]

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Matthew Franks

Months ahead of the London 2012 Olympics, bleary-eyed Tube passengers who looked up from their iPhones and *Metro* copies came face to face with exhortatory advertisements. Walk part of your journey to avoid queues (Transport for London); “Set a new personal best” by conserving shower water (Thames Water); forgo holiday travel to stay home and cheer at the telly (British Airways)—all ways to support Team GB.<sup>1</sup> The ad for the Mayor of London's Capital Clean-up (co-sponsored by Procter & Gamble) showed a brick wall covered with graffiti:

You know when your mum's coming round to your flat and you give the place a quick tidy? Well, that's exactly what we're doing. Except our “flat” is London and our “mum” is the rest of the world coming round.... We have litter to pick, graffiti to scrub and flowers to plant.... Come on, make your mum proud.<sup>2</sup>

Such patronizing text goes at least as far back as Postwar Britain's nanny state, whose (corporate-sponsorless) posters admonished readers to eliminate filth, contamination, and crowds: “Keep Britain Tidy”; “Coughs And Sneezes Spread Diseases”; “Staggered Holidays Help Everybody: There's more room remember in June and September.”<sup>3</sup> At that time,

vandals transformed state hoardings into examples of the squalor against which the signs preached: a Mass Observation survey reported that 58 percent of an early postwar road safety poster's London copies had been defaced, and London Transport regularly received extra posters in advance for the same reason.<sup>4</sup> Updating this tradition, the London 2012 campaign inspired graffiti by Banksy and other street artists, leading Transport Police to preemptively ban from the games several individuals, including one who turned out to have been hired by Adidas.<sup>5</sup> Through vandalism or the appearance of it, the cheeky voice of rebellion scribbled over the regulating voice of authority: *vox populi* tagged onto the *vox Dei*.

Sprayed, printed, or inscribed text historically has proved more durable for vandals than live or recorded speech. Long before YouTube enabled users to share rap mashups assembled from David Cameron's stump speeches, Sicilians scratched insults about Gaius Verres's mistress above the Roman magistrate's tribunal platform.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, written rather than spoken text has allowed the state to impose its authority more pervasively. Fifteenth-century royal proclamations gave us the English word "poster," and George Orwell predicted the omnipresent telescreen in the same year that Britain's Central Office of Information covered one fifth of all outdoor ad space with signage.<sup>7</sup> Optically, Big Brother; but verbally, a nagging nanny, particularly whenever urging safety, hygiene, or other orderly conduct. In a 1965 *Spectator* column, Conservative MP Iain Macleod coined the doubly sexist and classist term "Nanny State" to describe the government's suggestion of a 70 mph speed limit on motorways.<sup>8</sup> The charge of nanny-statism has since been leveled against government attempts to regulate everything from drinking soda to taking selfies with tigers.<sup>9</sup> Signs of vandalism against the nanny state have been equally varied, from rude messages scribbled on school lavatory walls, to police car windows smashed by homeless who prefer prisons to shelters.<sup>10</sup>

Posters with graffiti are among the most visible examples of vandalism against the nanny state; this essay focuses on more off-the-wall exploits by public-library prankster and playwright Joe Orton (1933–67). For book historians accustomed to thinking of the state’s relationship to print in terms of theatrical metaphors, such as Rebecca Knuth’s characterization of book burning as “public spectacle,” or Isabel Hofmeyr’s assertion that printed documents are “props in the theatre of ruling, policing, and dragooning,” Orton offers a provocative test case.<sup>11</sup> After spending six months in prison for defacing library books with his boyfriend (and eventual murderer), the working-class-born and RADA-scholarship-educated Orton emerged in 1962 to become one of Postwar Britain’s most important dramatists. His sharp, subversive dialogue earned him the sobriquet “the Oscar Wilde of Welfare State gentility,” and although his career ended when he was clubbed to death a short time later, he managed to pen a number of scandalous black comedies that gave rise to the adjective “Ortonesque”—“displaying dark or anarchic humour.”<sup>12</sup> Best known are the plays *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* (1964), *Loot* (1965), and *What the Butler Saw* (performed posthumously in 1969); at the time of his death, Orton was at work on a screenplay for the Beatles. Alongside Harold Pinter, John Osborne, Ann Jellicoe, and Tom Stoppard, Orton helped make 1960s London the world’s theater capital, with plays that were as stylistically daring as they were sexually explicit. How did one form of vandalism on the printed page inform another on the spoken stage? Why are media regulators so often analogized to old maids, and their vandals to young men? What role do books and other media play as mouthpieces for state authority, and as canvases for talking back to it?

### **Caught Read-Handed, or Booking the Criminal**



In 1962, the *Daily Mirror* reported that “strange things” had begun to happen to books borrowed from Islington’s public libraries: “Old ladies found pictures of gorillas in books about roses. Mythology readers found passages from Edgar Wallace in the middle of chapters about Greek gods. Art-lovers found that faces in reproductions of great paintings had been replaced by the faces of cats, birds and frogs.”<sup>13</sup> Coarser examples went unreported. A volume of plays by Emlyn Williams had obtained new titles: *Night Must Fall* was now *Knickers Must Fall*; *The Light of Heart* had become *Fucked by Monty*.<sup>14</sup> The front and back of a naval novel by Bentz Plagemann had been pasted over with photographs of men in loincloths, while the flyjacket of a Dorothy Sayers detective novel included a typewritten blurb that encouraged readers to “have a good shit” as they read.<sup>15</sup> Earlier that year, the police had arrested then-unknown Orton along with his boyfriend Kenneth Halliwell and charged them with stealing and defacing 72 library books and removing from others 1,653 plates, most of which covered the walls of their nearby flat. Orton and Halliwell were prosecuted, fined, and sentenced to six months in prison.

When he rose to fame two years later, Orton told an interviewer that his time in prison had hardened him to society and transformed his career; punning on his cutting and pasting, he claimed that “being in the nick brought detachment to my writing.”<sup>16</sup> He told another interviewer that “before I went in I wrote on library books ... and when I came out I wrote on real paper and it turned into plays,” echoing the practice of early modern writers who, in an age when paper was expensive, treated the margins of books as training ground for more mature works.<sup>17</sup> Cost could have been a factor: Orton and Halliwell led an especially frugal lifestyle, rising with the sun to save money on electricity, and surviving on the dole in order to devote their time to reading, writing, and pranking. The first news reports of the library book debacle described them as frustrated authors and suggested jealousy as their motive.

Yet Orton attributed his hijinks to the day he discovered that his local library did not carry Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

I was enraged that there were so many rubbishy novels and rubbishy books. It reminded me of the phrase in the Bible: "Of the making of books, there is no end," because there isn't. Libraries might as well not exist; they've got endless shelves for rubbish and hardly any space for good books.... When the Arabs took Alexandria they used the contents of the library to provide fuel for the baths and Gibbon thought that probably the books were doing more good being so used than they were when being read.<sup>18</sup>

Orton turns the vandal into a trash collector, making hygiene from rubbish and utility from waste. His emphasis on utility ironizes the utilitarian philosophies that had long underpinned the public library movement. Following Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, nineteenth-century advocates argued that the public library should be an institution for meritocratic self-education, or "the people's university." This ideal was rearticulated by the postwar welfare state, which introduced the 1964 Act requiring local councils to provide free public libraries and more than doubled expenditure between 1961 and 1967, financing modern Scandinavian-style buildings and new acquisitions aimed at providing book collections that met a wide range of needs—commentators quipped that public libraries had become "the national health service for books."<sup>19</sup> Orton's complaints about his local library's selection belie the comprehensive metropolitan coverage that began during the Blitz: following the war, the Joint Fiction Reserve and Metropolitan Special Collections were established to ensure the availability somewhere in London of all fiction and nonfiction books "likely to be required by the student of literature, or by the reader having some definite purpose," as one 1961

librarian's handbook put it. Islington's libraries were responsible for Physics, Chemistry, and fiction writers GRI-HOY.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Orton's demand for "good" books strikes at the heart of public library policy. As Wayne Wiegand has observed of the United States, the public library system was "built on an ideology of reading shared with fellow middle-class professionals who believed that good reading led to good social behavior, bad reading to bad social behavior."<sup>21</sup> It was practically a given that "bad" reading constituted primarily fiction of one kind or another, rather than, say, *Mein Kampf*. In 1950s Britain, the expansion of higher education and increased funds for book acquisition resurrected the Victorian "Great Fiction Question," now known as the "fiction problem." Instead of wondering whether fiction had any place in a public library, the question narrowed to genre: should "light fiction" or "sub-literature" make the cut? By 1964, fiction accounted for around two-thirds of all library borrowing in London, with romance and crime stories as the most popular genres.<sup>22</sup> Placing renewed emphasis on the public library's educative role, conservative librarians argued unsuccessfully that such genres should cease to be added to the stock, since they could be procured elsewhere without difficulty. These librarians proscribed not only fiction, but also recreational non-fiction: popular travel and biography, books about gardening and handicrafts, and so on. A 1962 librarian's handbook decried recreational reading—and the librarians who supported it—as wasteful: "It is unlikely that such attitudes will commend themselves to the serious librarian who believes that he has a definite and positive function in the community."<sup>23</sup> But the majority of librarians implicitly endorsed democratic selection, with some arguing overtly that librarians should not discriminate. One even turned the tables to suggest that light fiction "may be important for the stability of the community," anticipating the kinds of arguments Janice Radway has made about romance novels for women readers in the United States.<sup>24</sup> From the end of the fifties and into the sixties, reader satisfaction balanced the books in a

new way: comprehensive surveys suggested that public library stocks were “bad” (in the sense of incomplete rather than frivolous or immoral) because the books on the shelves did not always match local readers’ needs. As a result, libraries continued to stock ever-larger amounts of popular fiction, which by the late fifties largely was seen as the “missing service” or the “last stage of library development.”<sup>25</sup> Orton’s vandalism of popular fiction and recreational nonfiction bear evidence of his dissatisfaction with the welfare state spending too much public money on what he deemed garbage, even as his predilection for combining the high-minded with the base inevitably meant that ostensibly “good” books also came under the knife.

Whatever his motive, Orton’s methods set him, as much as his books, apart. If public libraries were going to provide recreation rather than education, Orton would raise the stakes. Unlike Arabs converting books into tinder, Orton’s biblio-vandalism depended on imaginative congruity. He recalled a biography of the British pathologist Sir Bernard Spilsbury in which he replaced a photograph captioned “The remains discovered in the cellar at number 23 Rosedown Road” with an image of Jacques-Louis David’s painting *The Death of Marat*: “I left the original caption underneath, so that it really did look like what it said.... This picture of the corpse in the bath had quite an effect on people who opened the book.”<sup>26</sup> The effect comes from a surprising contrast in register: where the reader expects to see a contemporary and unremarkable photograph of a plot of ground, he or she instead encounters a striking eighteenth-century oil painting of a revolutionary martyr. The tension between this high tragedy and the prosaic caption beneath it produces the playful effect: the logic of the pairing hides the vandal’s hand as it forces new meaning from old materials.

If Orton’s alterations pun on shifts in register, they also fulfill the double entendre promised by William Sherman’s account of readers’ markings in “dirty books.”<sup>27</sup> A biography of Sybil Thorndike contained a photograph of the actress playing the First World

War nurse Edith Cavell locked in a prison cell. Orton pasted below it a caption from the memoirs of the tattoo artist George Burchett which read: “During the Second World War I was working from dawn to dusk to serve the many thousands of sailors, soldiers and airmen. American G.I.s came in shoals to my surgery and some had very peculiar orders for me.”<sup>28</sup> Next to Dame Sybil’s face, Orton inserted the naked torso of a Grecian-male statue.<sup>29</sup> Here, a contemporary photograph of a dignified actress portraying a dignified martyr transforms into an absurd yet logically coherent dungeon-porn fantasy with the mere addition of a classical statue and a formerly inoffensive caption. Orton’s alterations suggest that in combination these images and texts unleash a latent ribald energy that otherwise pulses just below the surface.

Dame Sybil further reveals the literal theatricality of Orton’s vandalism. His altered books include biographies of the actor Alec Clunes, the ballet dancer Robert Helpmann, and the stage couple Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. Orton replaced the dustjacket photographs of Thorndike and Clunes with a barebreasted bronze sculpture and a crushed skull, making fun of the actors’ old ages and the heroic reverence with which biographers regard their subjects.<sup>30</sup> He swapped the photograph of Robert Helpmann for a collaged image of an eighteenth-century theatre audience watching two men wrestling, poking fun at Helpmann’s homosexuality.<sup>31</sup> An added bonus to mocking theater history was that Orton could use photographs of actors in nontheatrical books. A book jacket with portraits of *The Great Tudors* received new heads from Lunt and the actor Roger Livesey, along with the army officer T.E. Lawrence, a monkey, and a skeleton (Figure 1).<sup>32</sup> This new cover reimagines a sober account of English history as a profane stage play in the style of *Carry On* or *Monty Python*. A similar cover replaced *The Three Faces of Eve* (a medical book about multiple personality disorder) with the faces of Helpmann, Thorndike, and a cat (Figure 2).<sup>33</sup> Such theatrics needed not always be profane. Orton papered over at least sixteen plain Arden

Shakespeare covers with beautiful collages drawn from classical sculpture and early modern oil paintings (Figure 3). His respect for Shakespeare may have kept the cheek in check, but these covers confirm that Orton saw library patrons as spectators to his performances. Or were readers also part of the show? One version of public library history tells of mounting surveillance: buildings redesigned to allow maximum supervision of user groups, from distinct departments for women and children, to Anthony Panizzi's influential round reading room at the British Museum Library, which facilitated clear sightlines.<sup>34</sup> Orton's layered theatricality, combined with his habit of lurking in corners to wait for unsuspecting readers in order to observe their reactions, reconfigures the public library panopticon as an episode of *Candid Camera*, with Orton as the only viewer—or, in a twist on Christina Lupton's "conscious" texts, with the uncannily doctored books themselves as the only viewers.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to biographies, histories, and medical books, Orton transformed popular genre fiction into distinctive productions. Over the self-serious graphic covers of detective thrillers and romance novels he pasted cutouts of cats, birds, and half-naked men: the men usually are blindfolded or wrestling (Figure 4). Though these book jackets share some visual affinities with photomontages by 1950s collage artist Richard Hamilton, they differ in their focused subversion of genre fiction. Another way of putting this is that they convey their message better as book jackets than as stand-alone collages: they are meant to be encountered *in situ*, and to push literary genres to their limits. Orton's recurring images suggest a new genre of camp and gay erotica even as they turn other genres into exaggerations, or farces, of themselves, and all nearly twenty years before Britain would see its first gay and lesbian bookshop.<sup>36</sup> Campiness emerges most clearly in the altered flyjackets, onto which Orton typewrote directly. He added the following blurb to one of Dorothy Sayers' *Lord Peter* novels:

Mrs Henriques, an elderly bird watcher, observes through her very powerful field glasses the rape of Janet Oolish. It strikes her as the work of an accomplished master. When Janet becomes pregnant Mrs Henriques accepts [sic] responsibility, though she knows that Janet has been deflowered by her own dear son Baldwin. When Baldwin begins to appear at breakfast dressed in the cast off clothing of Janet Oolish, Mrs Henriques feels the time has come to call in Lord Peter Wimsey [sic].<sup>37</sup>

In both content and presentation, these blurbs hover on the edges of the detective novel. They stretch the genre to absurdity as they highlight its prurient contrivances, from the “very powerful field glasses” to the obvious disguises and ridiculously posh character names.

Also the stuff of detective fiction: ensnaring the biblio-vandals. After years spent doctoring books at Islington Central Library, Orton and Halliwell switched to the smaller branch library, where librarians were able to observe readers more closely. Eventually, eyes settled on two men who shared the same address and who always visited the library together. Hoping to catch the men “red-handed,” undercover librarians posed as browsing readers. After several unproductive weeks, librarians enlisted the police in a sting operation, sending a false complaint about an unregistered vehicle to Orton and Halliwell’s flat, which was returned with an indignant message typewritten from the same machine used on the fly-leaves. When police arrived at the flat and saw the 1,653 loose plates covering the bedroom walls, the game was up (Figures 5 and 6). In order to accurately assess the damages, determined to be £262 17s 6d, the librarians further identified all but 30 plates—which required them to determine by size, paper type, and appearance which publisher was likely to have produced the book from which the plate was taken. Because many of the plates had been cut into small pieces, this task was very arduous indeed, and Westminster City Council

librarians were called upon to lend their expertise. Chief Librarian C.A. Elliott observed that the judge was “astounded that librarians possessed such skills!”<sup>38</sup>

In court, it was the addition of a monkey’s face to the cover of *Collins Guide to Roses* that provoked the greatest ire (Figure 7). As Orton recalled: “What I had done was held up as the depth of iniquity for which I should probably have been birched. They won’t ever do that so they just sent me to prison for six months.”<sup>39</sup> This suggestion of birching completes an erotic fantasy that the court’s prudish indictment would have preferred to avoid. The magistrate addressed Orton and Halliwell directly: “I am most concerned about the malice shown by you both in what you did—sheer malice towards fellow-users of this library who, until these books are replaced, will be denied what they might reasonably have expected to enjoy.”<sup>40</sup> Other accounts suggest that if not patrons, at least some librarians anticipated and enjoyed the alterations. Head of Islington Local History Centre Mark Aston later reported that librarians “almost looked forward to the next instalment. It became a bit of a game. But after two and a half years, it had to end.”<sup>41</sup>

The dismantling of books holds a fundamental place in public library history. Victorian economist Walter Stanley Jevons claimed that library books that were destroyed from being read to death had fulfilled the “accomplishment of their mission.”<sup>42</sup> Orton and Halliwell flipped this around and “mutilated” (the chief librarian’s word) books that did not fulfill the public library’s educative mandate. In more positive terms, Orton and Halliwell asserted their presence like early modern book inscribers, who, as Anthony Bale has argued, were “resolutely material and transgressively appropriative of textual and visual space,” and whose alterations “balance precariously between damage and enhancement, use and abuse, of the surface on which they are written.”<sup>43</sup> Bale compares these inscriptions to graffiti; for Orton and Halliwell, who altered the state’s books rather than their own, the analogy applies even better. In this reading, marginalia comes from marginalization: as gay men, Orton and



Halliwell anonymously announced their presence to a society that was unable to acknowledge their needs—however much it inadvertently financed their lifestyle—and that ultimately sent them to prison “because,” as Orton wrote privately to Halliwell, “we were queers.”<sup>44</sup> Today, the Islington Local History Centre trots out their handiwork with pride, periodically organizing exhibitions that highlight the dialectical relationship between vandalism and art lately epitomized by Banksy. The jackets themselves are now kept under lock and key, since fans had begun to steal them.<sup>45</sup>

Orton and Halliwell’s cutting-and-pasting combines two strains of literary vandalism by materially destroying texts, on the one hand, and by textually assaulting the literary establishment, on the other. The first strain descends from a history of conflagration: John Murray tossing Lord Byron’s memoirs into the fire; Nazis torching a pyre of books in Opernplatz; Mikhail Bulgakov setting flame to the novel in which he famously claimed “manuscripts don’t burn.” The second strain arrives by way of literary iconoclasts and their critics: Virginia Woolf accusing James Joyce of breaking all the windows of the house of fiction; a British columnist railing against the Booker Committee for awarding the prize to James Kelman’s supposedly anarchic swearing in *How Late It Was, How Late*; an American columnist describing Don DeLillo’s speculative novel about John F. Kennedy’s assassination as “literary vandalism and bad citizenship” to boot.<sup>46</sup> What’s most striking about both strains is the ease with which literary vandalism entangles political rights, whether by threatening the decorum of a democratic society, or by presaging the burning of bodies in a totalitarian state. For Orton and Halliwell, the second strain was just as important as the first: by anonymously defacing library books, they critiqued not only the state-administered library, but also a literary establishment that had grown formally complacent and hopelessly middlebrow. The library didn’t stock good books (or good contemporary novels, at any rate) because none were being written, though Orton and Halliwell certainly tried to fix this,

spending the late fifties writing half a dozen novels together and separately. Historian Arthur Marwick has claimed that mid-century British fiction remained “fundamentally naturalistic.... For literary innovation, it was necessary to go to the theatre.”<sup>47</sup> After Orton turned the library into a theater metaphorically, he began to take this directive more literally.

### **Media Regulation: Mrs. Grundy, Lady Bracknell, Auntie Beeb**

In the year following Orton’s prison release, prudery was on the prowl. Though Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* had just been published legally in Britain, a London bookseller refused to display a book whose jacket featured William Blake’s drawing of a naked man. A composer tried to prosecute the BBC for broadcasting the racy sixteenth-century drama *Gammer Gurton’s Needle*, while the London Dance Institute banned the twist. In Chesterfield, a hospital ordered nurses to lengthen their skirts below their knees; in Knightsbridge, a district council asked the police to arrest nude sunbathers who used public beaches. One young female undergraduate was expelled from university after being found in bed with a male student. (He only received a fortnight’s suspension.) Across the pond, a Los Angeles school board tried to ban *Tarzan* from children’s libraries on the grounds that Tarzan and Jane were cohabiting their tree house. All of these regulatory examples featured in the opening pages of Peter Fryer’s 1963 book *Mrs Grundy: Studies in English Prudery*, in which he remarked:

Prudery is fear and hatred of pleasure, primarily of sexual pleasure; and Mrs Grundy is a prude who carries this fear and hatred to the stage of more or less organized interference with other people’s pleasures. The private prude and

the prude-at-large are both obsessed by an awareness of the vast amount of unregulated pleasure that is being enjoyed in the world; this they call sin....

To the prude and to Mrs Grundy, however, the sexual activity of others is simultaneously inflammatory and disgusting, and of such obsessive interest that it is rarely far from their thoughts.<sup>48</sup>

The original Mrs. Grundy was the unseen neighbor in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (1798); Oscar Wilde would refer to her as "that amusing old lady who represents the only original form of humour that the middle classes of this country have been able to produce."<sup>49</sup> Wilde put his own spin on Mrs. Grundy and her prudish surveillance when (in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, 1895) he launched forth Lady Augusta Bracknell, his upper-class epigram-wielding authority on Victorian propriety and good conduct. Lady Bracknell could be Mrs. Grundy's sister who married well—less priggish, more powerful. Most important for our purposes: she was well known to Orton.<sup>50</sup> He would later claim that prison had motivated him to write plays capturing the voice of the "old whore society."<sup>51</sup> Biblio-vandalism had taught him a thing or two about transposing between registers: tragic to base, sacred to profane. And so, as he had with David's *Marat* and Thorndike's Nurse Cavell, he set to work on Wilde's Lady Bracknell, who ultimately became his megaphone for the nanny state.<sup>52</sup>

Of Lady Bracknell's many incarnations in Orton's work, her most obvious is Mrs. Vealfoy, the employee-pamphlet-spewing manager in his television play *The Good and Faithful Servant* (1967). While Wilde caricatures the arrangement of marriage as though it were a business contract, Orton reworks Wilde's dialogue to stage the complementary scenario, imagining the sadistic claims an employer makes on her employee's private life. By using the same authoritarian figure to represent a meddlesome society, both playwrights

question the degree to which society attempts to subordinate individual agency. But while Lady Bracknell's professionalizing of the personal paints her as a comic threat, Mrs. Vealfoy's personalizing of the professional carries greater menace. Lady Bracknell's reach extends in Orton's later plays as she evolves into a figure of authority bent on enforcing the will of an out-of-control state. She changes genders, morphing into a male police chief (in *Loot*) and a National Health Service doctor (in *What the Butler Saw*). The police chief's claim that "Any deception I practiced was never intended to deceive you" envenoms Lady Bracknell's comic attitude toward her husband: "I do not propose to undeceive him. Indeed I have never undeceived him on any question."<sup>53</sup> These subtle manipulations of speech, which hinge on the false assurances of "never," alert us to the fallacies of a language system running on overly slick gears. Orton demonstrates how the nanny state's attempts to regulate behavior provoke madness, corruption, and disorder. Meanwhile, state employees as ostensibly benevolent as nurses and ministers turn out to be murderers.

In his plays no less than his biography, Orton showed that Britain's welfare state had enough of the grave and the gay both to incarcerate excessively and to commit real acts of violence. Sharp as Wilde's language is, it pales in comparison to Orton's police chief kicking a character "*violently*" and "*knocking [him] to the floor,*" or to the "*blood pouring*" from the gunshot wound inflicted by a police sergeant.<sup>54</sup> Sixties Britain saw a rise in spectacularly violent crime, including the Great Train Robbery (1963), the Moors Murders (1963–65), and the Shepherd's Bush Police Murders (1966). Police resorted to firearms more frequently, counteracting the image of the respectfully benign British "bobby" that had reigned since the Victorian era.<sup>55</sup> Such graphic acts of state violence had never been presented in British farce, and they are perhaps Orton's greatest contribution to the genre. But physical power still fits fist in glove with linguistic dominance—or, as Orton's police chief puts it to one victim: "If I ever hear you accuse the police of using violence on a prisoner in custody again, I'll take you

down to the station and beat the eyes out of your head.”<sup>56</sup> Orton’s welfare-state officials monitor the speech of everyone around them. A state doctor explains one character’s apparent predilection for rape: “She may mean ‘Yes’ when she says ‘No.’ It’s elementary feminine psychology.”<sup>57</sup> Orton reveals the danger of rigid language binaries, which prevent the doctor from detecting the subtleties between yes and no, or between boy and girl-dressed-as-boy. The state’s regulatory pro forma language rejects facts that don’t conform to one of two choices—facts that are not, in any case, the state’s business. If the regulation of behavior follows from the regulation of speech, then Orton’s welfare state officials are also censors.

Orton’s plays follow his biblio-vandalism to demonstrate how citizens easily get confused with property. In *Mrs Grundy*, Fryer posits that “prudery’s first line of defence is the regulation of speech”: moving from taboo words to the taboo media that deliver them, “the prude in authority becomes a censor.” Fryer considers the British Museum Library’s “Private Case,” whose works were omitted from the General Catalogue: “It is clearly necessary to protect valuable and, in some cases, irreplaceable books from thieves, mutilators, and scribblers, all of whom find erotica peculiarly attractive. But the protection of ‘Private Case’ works need not entail their omission from the catalogue.”<sup>58</sup> One wonders what Fryer would make of the many scribblers who turn innocuous books *into* erotica—Orton and Halliwell, but also the nineteenth-century reader who added “mildly pornographic” illustrations to Count Gamba’s *Amours, Intrigues, and Adventures of Lord Byron*, or the more recent Oxford student whose marginalia altered the opening sentence of an introduction to Plato’s *Meno* to read: “It has often been said that the best introduction to philosophy is *wanking*.”<sup>59</sup> Private Case or not, sometimes it’s books, rather than readers, that need the censor’s protection.

It’s fitting, then, that after Orton spent years fiddling with the state’s books, the state spent years returning the favor. The British Museum Library’s Principal Keeper found his

theatrical corollary in the Royal Household's Lord Chamberlain: 1963 was also the year Lord Cobbold took over that post for what would turn out to be the final inning of theater censorship. Though stage censorship had existed since the days of Henry VIII, the Licensing Act 1737 gave the Lord Chamberlain formal power to approve plays. He tuned his blue-pencil scribbling to seismic signals of impropriety, and although no major challenge had been mounted to his authority since the Edwardian era, the sociocultural earthquakes of the 1960s, combined with the conspicuous lack of government censorship for mass media like film and television, rendered his position increasingly ridiculous. Cobbold paddled to keep up with the liberalizing legislation enacted by the Labour administrations of 1964 and 1966, which included the Abolition of Death Penalty Act 1965, Abortion Act 1967, Family Planning Act 1967 (providing free contraceptives), Sexual Offences Act 1967 (decriminalizing homosexuality), and Theatres Act 1968 (stripping away the Lord Chamberlain's power to censor the stage at all). With these transformative measures, Mrs. Grundy was dragged into the new era of a "permissive society." As Arthur Marwick puts it: "British society seemed to have broken out of the straitjacket of dullness and conformity which had pinioned it since Victorian times."<sup>60</sup> Historically, the Lord Chamberlain had always banned a small minority of plays, and in his five years as censor, Cobbold licensed 10,110 plays, banned 30, and placed 79 in a "waiting" tray to encourage playwrights to reconsider.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Nicholas De Jongh observes that by the 1960s, "the Lord Chamberlain was like a tired old domestic vainly employed with bucket, scrubbing-brush and soap to rid the theatre of vulgar graffiti that kept on reappearing."<sup>62</sup> We shift from cutting as vandalism to cutting to prevent it.

Though the Lord Chamberlain had the final say on stage censorship, he usually delegated that responsibility to two civil servants: the Comptroller (who managed the Lord Chamberlain's office on a daily basis) and the Examiner of Plays. The Examiner reading

Orton's first stage play, *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, originally listed twenty cuts, which included:

"Why don't you shut your mouth and give your arse a chance?"

"He was an expert on the adolescent male body."

"You wanted to see if my titties were all my own."

"You've a whole bloody baker's shop in the oven from the look of that."

After the Comptroller reinstated most of the Examiner's cuts, the Lord Chamberlain removed them again, though he ultimately cut the phrase "grinding to her climax."<sup>63</sup> In 1964, this made *Sloane* the first licensed play to address homosexuality directly: the subject had been banned from the stage until the 1957 Wolfenden Report, which recommended the decriminalization of homosexual acts between two consenting adult males in private. Though it would be another ten years before the recommendations were implemented—one reason Orton publicly insisted that Halliwell was his flatmate—the report's notoriety made it unnecessary to continue banning homosexuality from the stage for fear of corrupting innocent spectators. When the 1960 *Lady Chatterley* trial determined that literary merit trumped obscenity, the Lord Chamberlain's position seemed even less tenable. As his Assistant Comptroller acknowledged the next year: "The Lord Chamberlain cannot, even if he wished to do so, forever travel in a horse carriage; he is now in a motor car and many people are trying to force him into a space-ship."<sup>64</sup> That is, off the planet. In truth, Orton was able to give voice to a strangling nanny state only because nanny had all but removed her hands from his and other dramatists' necks.<sup>65</sup> And so Orton did the censor one better: he wrote the *Daily Telegraph* under various perturbed pseudonyms, none more insistent than "Edna Welthorpe (Mrs)", who found herself "nauseated by this endless parade of mental and

physical perversion.... Today's young playwrights take it upon themselves to flaunt their contempt for ordinary decent people. I hope that the ordinary decent people will shortly strike *back!*"<sup>66</sup> Orton had been inspired by the popular mid-century dramatist Terence Rattigan, who had long claimed to write for a symbolic playgoer, "Aunt Edna"—"a nice respectable, middle-class, middle-aged, maiden lady, with time on her hands and the money to help her pass it."<sup>67</sup> When Criterion Theatre management forwarded Orton a letter from an angry *Loot* spectator, "Edna" wrote back with an invitation to visit the Lord Chamberlain together.<sup>68</sup>

Aunt Edna represents another example of Orton vandalizing other playwrights' regulatory characters, but if inside the theater these characters menaced, outside of it they merely whinged. The biggest difference between Lady Bracknell and Aunt Edna isn't in the tenor of her contempt but in the power she wields. Does she speak for or from the Establishment? Does she suffocate, or simply irritate? Could one ever grow fond of her? Since the 1950s, the *Daily Mail* has called the BBC "Auntie" as shorthand for a maiden aunt whose chief duty is to direct her listeners to religion and ethics; today, "Auntie Beeb" is just as often a moniker of endearment as of reproach.<sup>69</sup> But the larger question is: why are media regulators so often analogized to old maids, whether part of the state apparatus or not? In practice, Orton's most threatening nanny-state avatars are male doctors and police, even if they learned to speak from Lady Bracknell. The Lord Chamberlain and his readers were men too, but that didn't stop one member of the House of Lords from dubbing Cobbold "the Aunt Edna of British theatre" during the inquiry that abolished pre-performance censorship following two particularly unpopular bans.<sup>70</sup> The feminist scholar Marian Sawer observes that since Victorian times, social regulation has been seen by critics to undermine the masculine principles of self-reliance: in 1873, she notes, the lawyer Sir William Harcourt denounced state interference as "grand-maternal government," or a betrayal of free-wheeling liberalism.<sup>71</sup> Coincidentally, this was also the year historian James Froude's doctrine of



“paternalism” was first reported to describe the policy that England should adopt toward Ireland.<sup>72</sup> Today, paternalism summons up images of imperialism and slavery; the nanny state, of safety belts and no-smoking signs. Social scientists Julian Le Grand and Bill New point out that the difference between paternalism and the nanny state is agency: while the former infringes on the individual’s rights from a desire to do good, the latter “infantilizes them and renders them incapable of exercising that autonomy,” sapping their intrinsic motivation to do anything for themselves.<sup>73</sup> Yet Orton and his characters seem invigorated by the nanny state. The old maid analogy best emerges in relation to the vandal.

### **Writing on the Fourth Wall**

In the same year as Fryer’s *Mrs Grundy* study, British physician Alex Comfort posited that societal prudery produces “a heightened emotional tension that leads to a state of persistent, because often unsatisfied, sexual excitement.”<sup>74</sup> Following this logic, for every Mrs. Grundy, there’s bound to be vandals. If media regulators often figure as older conservative females, their vandals almost always are young working-class males. In his study of 1960s vandalism, Colin Ward observes:

We all know the vandal. He is somebody else. In general terms he is someone whose activities in the environment we deplore, but we usually give the word a much more specific meaning. The stereotype of the vandal ... is that of a working-class male adolescent, and his act is the “wanton,” “senseless,” or “motiveless” destruction of property, usually public property of some kind. He and his behaviour constitute a “social problem.”<sup>75</sup>

The term “vandal” comes from the East German tribe that sacked Rome in 455, much like Orton’s Arabs in Alexandria; Stanley Cohen writes that “vandalism” was coined to describe the destruction of art during the French Revolution.<sup>76</sup> In Britain, however, the literary vandal often has been figured as a well-born romantic adolescent, from Orlando carving Rosalind’s name into trees in the Forest of Arden, to Tennyson etching his own into a wall in Stratford.<sup>77</sup> For a more textured genealogy of the working-class vandals that appear in Orton’s plays, we could look to the wily saboteur Bill Stickers.

Bill Stickers infiltrated comic journals and sketches on both sides of the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. In 1832, the *Times* (of London) reported that a certain Mr. Powell had attacked the billsticker posting a bill against Powell’s house, tearing the bill down, and violently beating the billsticker “with the sticks used in posting the bills, and then broke them.”<sup>78</sup> That weekend, a humor miscellany published “A Caution to Bill Stickers” in verse with the refrain, “Bill-stickers, beware, beware!” and a character was born.<sup>79</sup> In *Sketches by Seymour* (1836), one plate reads:

What a mysterious being is the bill-sticker! How seldom does he make himself visible to the eyes of the people.... That he is an industrious being, and sticks to business, there cannot be the shadow of a doubt, for every dead-wall is made lively by his operations, and every hoard a fund of information—in such type, too, that he who runs may read. What an indefatigable observer he must be; for there is scarcely a brick or board in city or suburb, however newly erected, in highway or byeway, but is speedily adorned by his handiwork—aye, and frequently too in defiance of the threatening—“BILL-STICKERS, BEWARE!”—staring him in the face.<sup>80</sup>

One needn't struggle to connect this speedy adornment with a stick to sexual bravado. It's worth remembering as well that many billstickers were illiterate, endowing their vandalism with a particular ventriloquism.<sup>81</sup> By the 1960s, the threat wasn't Mr. Powell, but the nanny state: a proliferation of notices claiming that "Bill Posters Will Be Prosecuted" were met with graffiti stating otherwise, perhaps due in part to Alan Sillitoe's novel about a writer who invents a similar persona, *The Death of William Posters* (1965).<sup>82</sup> Though an important difference between these taggers and the billstickers they defend is that the latter usually were remunerated for their vandalism—which in its present incarnation is majority-funded by multinational music labels that wish to appear edgy—the taggers scribbling "Bill Posters Is Innocent" answer back in the Ortonesque mode of call and response, making characters of threats.<sup>83</sup>

Like Orton himself, young male working-class vandals appear throughout his plays—the dandies on the dole to the nanny state's Lady Bracknells. Orton's vandals further stylishly inflect protagonists introduced by the so-called "angry young men," a group of working-class playwrights and novelists from the late 1950s that included Sillitoe, John Osborne, and Arnold Wesker. In this group, Arthur Marwick identifies "the beginnings of a perception of the working class not as stereotype, not as banner-bearer of the future, but as itself, on its own terms."<sup>84</sup> While the angry young men depicted working-class characters naturalistically, Orton gave his aesthetic flair. Biographically, the Leicester-hailing Orton conforms to Richard Hoggart's 1957 description of the working-class scholarship youth who is "emotionally uprooted from their class, often under the stimulus of a stronger critical intelligence or imagination"—a plight as relatable to the lowborn sophisticate as to the metropolitanized homosexual.<sup>85</sup> Orton's vandals go so far as to articulate their outsider position by identifying the unsanctioned sources of their corruption. Sloane attributes his

murderous tendencies to his “upbringing. Lack of training. No proper parental control.”<sup>86</sup> Hal explains his behavior of thieving from slot machines and deflowering the daughters of better men by insisting: “It’s the comics I read. Sure of it.”<sup>87</sup> Orton playfully subverts scapegoats employed by the welfare state into maxims of self-knowledge, suggesting that society’s stock excuses drive a wedge between an individual and his or her moral responsibility. The flipside to “She may mean ‘Yes’ when she says ‘No’” is when the woman it describes says of the hotel pageboy, Nick: “He’s been depressed by his failure in commerce. That’s why he took to rape.”<sup>88</sup> The welfare state’s reductive linguistic associations patently foil the characters’ collective desire for an orgy.

Appropriately, the characters who earnestly parrot state-sanctioned sources meet defeat. When the one morally upright character in *Loot* suggests that “the police are for the protection of ordinary people,” the police chief retorts: “I don’t know where you pick up these slogans, sir. You must read them on hoardings.”<sup>89</sup> When Sloane attacks his caretakers, one of them asks: “Is this what we listen to the *Week’s Good Cause* for? A lot of vicars and actresses making appeals for cash gifts to raise hooligans who can’t control themselves?”<sup>90</sup> Orton’s characters symptomatize the postwar nanny state’s media empire. After consistently communicating wartime progress via the Home and External services, BBC Radio witnessed “a second golden era” boom in topical programming and drama.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, state posters had been engaged to mobilize citizens as part of the war effort, and exponents were “anxious that the lessons of their unique contribution in war should not be forgotten but developed in the interests of the whole community and serve the greater cause of peace,” as designer Abram Games put it in 1948.<sup>92</sup> As charity appeals like *Week’s Good Cause* encouraged listeners to be altruistic neighbors, nanny state posters demanded good conduct in couplets.<sup>93</sup> Postwar austerity (“Go easy with bread, eat potatoes instead”) gave way to nutritional tips (“Eat good food, no sticky mush; Both morn and night, please use the brush”). Exhortations

to work (“Come on Yorkshire! Let’s get spinning. Let’s get weaving”) led to directives as to how one should spend (“Buy British Goods”) and save (“Whatever else you may have ... have a Post Office Savings Bank account as well.”)<sup>94</sup> The hapless character in *Loot* indeed could have been reciting from a late 1960s poster urging citizens to call the police (“Watch out! There’s a thief about.”)<sup>95</sup> Any number of signs promoted general health and safety.

Translating nanny-state nagging for the newly permissive society, a controversial 1969 poster by the Health Education Council featured a photograph of a seemingly pregnant man with the words: “Would you be more careful if it was you that got pregnant?”<sup>96</sup> Such posters confirm that Postwar Britain’s nanny state was increasingly characterized by exhortatory rather than statutory regulation. Hoardings were vandalized from the beginning: a 1946 road safety poster known as the “Black Widow” received graffiti that added lipstick, rouge, and eyeliner to the widow’s pale face, along with captions such as “She Voted Labour” or “Mine’s a Miner.”<sup>97</sup> Although technology made radio much harder to vandalize, poster graffiti found an analogue in offshore “pirate” stations, which began reaching Britain in the same year that Orton’s first play, *The Ruffian on the Stair* (1964), scandalized BBC Radio listeners.<sup>98</sup>

Orton’s plays theatricalize this vandalism by drawing from contemporary practices as well as prophesizing events that later occurred in real life. Graffiti artists painted lipstick and rouge on state posters; *What the Butler Saw* ends with a male police sergeant wearing a leopard-spotted dress and holding aloft a “*larger than life-sized bronze statue*” of Winston Churchill’s penis, which has been separated from a public monument in an accidental explosion.<sup>99</sup> In this particularly extreme example, Orton anticipates the defacement of the Parliament Square Churchill statue, which would be unveiled just four years after *Butler*, and which has subsequently endured urine, a green-turf mohawk, and red paint meant to symbolize soldiers’ blood.<sup>100</sup> To complement characters ironically parroting official language, Orton floods the stage with the state’s fugitive print matter. Theater has historically

extracted dramatic tension from circulating documents, whether Hamlet's love letters to Ophelia that are intercepted by Polonius, or the army lists that finally reveal Jack's name as Ernest. Orton populates his scenes with National Insurance cards, leatherbound directories, trading stamps, search warrants, and government leaflets, which together suggest that documents grasp characters rather than the reverse. The police chief who at first claims to be from the post office (the nexus of circulating documents) and then from the water board symbolizes this inescapability. His victim asks:

Now, look here—I've a right to know—are you from the sanitary people? I never knew they had power over the post office. Aren't they separate entities?... The water board and the post office? Or have they had a merger?... They'd never connect up the water board and the post office, would they?<sup>101</sup>

Rapid postwar nationalization brought services under government regulation, not control. The water companies were not nationalized, though the Water Act 1973 would establish the National Water Council, making Orton's play somewhat predictive. Even so, the homogeneity of the language linking posters, leaflets, and other ephemera from the General Post Office with various government ministries easily could give the impression that these ministries were the same entity, especially since the Central Office of Information produced most of their ephemera. If, as Andrew Piper has suggested, eighteenth-century writers were "dreaming in books," then Orton's welfare state citizens were speaking in documents.<sup>102</sup> When one character questions a doctor's authority, another replies: "He's on the register, what more do you want?"<sup>103</sup> When a different doctor asks the young woman interviewing to be his secretary to undress for an examination, she replies that this isn't in her booklet, "Hints

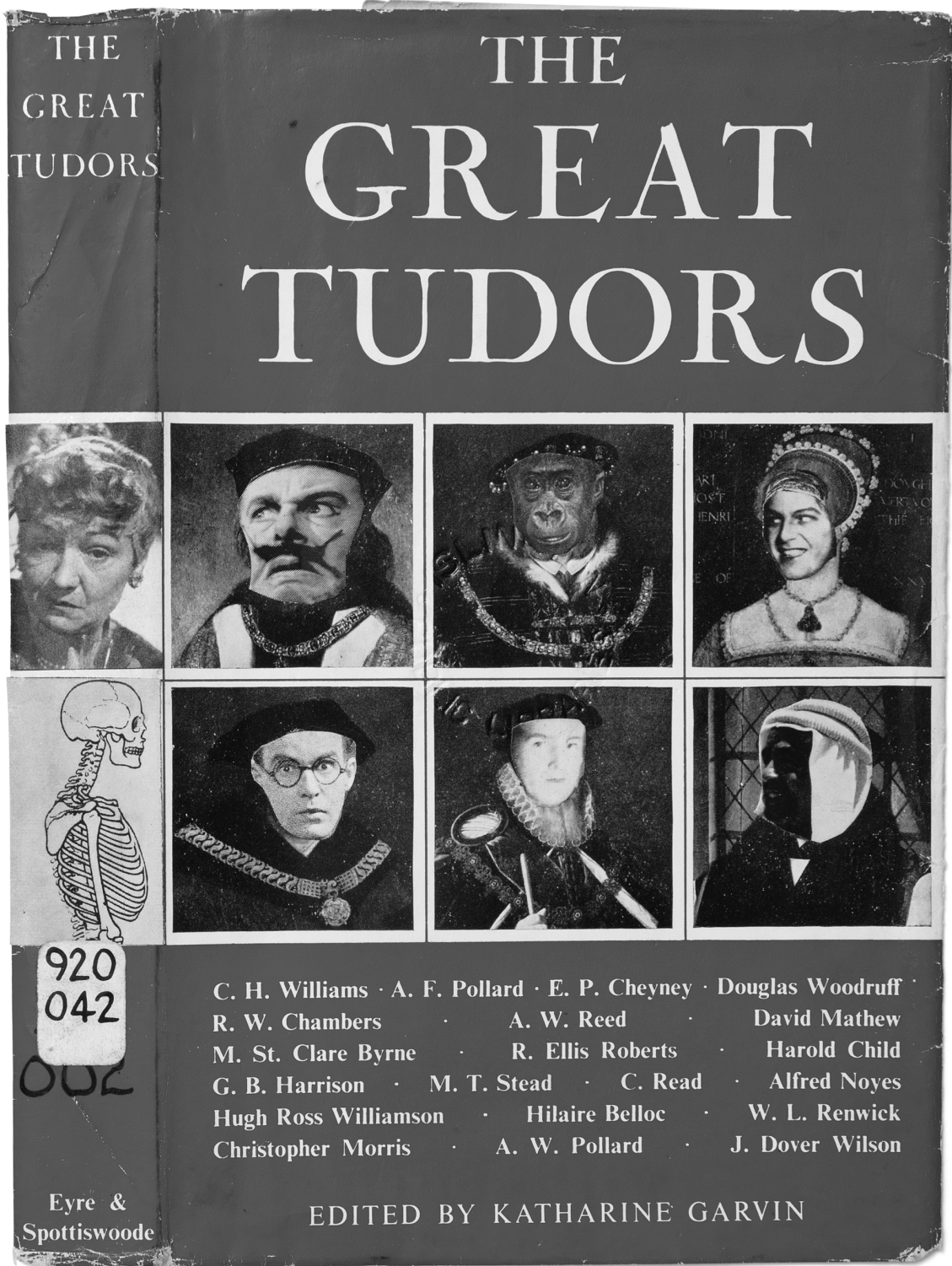
to the School-Leaver.”<sup>104</sup> After another character learns her father has been murdered, her first response is to ask: “Will I have to send his pension book in?”<sup>105</sup> All things we might hear people say, but not in line after line. The nanny state’s ubiquitous documents have infected Orton’s characters to the point that they are puppet-like—unable to think or feel in a way we think of as human.

Though Orton’s imprisonment reminds us of the welfare state’s pitfalls, from another perspective he is an exemplary success story. He nurtured his craft by reading and doctoring library books while living on government assistance. The BBC gave him his first break, and the Lord Chamberlain was more of a paper tiger than a bogeyman. With the nanny state as his muse, Orton turned the library into a theater, and the theater into a bustling media crossway. In his library pranks, he anticipated the numerous YouTube videos and college humor sites devoted to the subject, with the difference that while Orton took for his object the library book, contemporary tricksters sabotage the library environment. Whether chewing potato chips too loudly or playing an interminable booting-up sound on one’s laptop, such pranks remind us that libraries, like theaters, are among the few places where we are asked to keep ourselves and our electronic devices mute.<sup>106</sup> The frustrated library users in these videos resemble actors stopping mid-performance to chastise spectators for their ringing mobile phones.<sup>107</sup> As libraries deaccession their collections, we increasingly go to them for ready Wifi and silent atmosphere—a Reader’s Theater—rather than for books. But if we have elevated graffiti to the level of commercial art, biblio-vandalism counterintuitively has become the strongest argument for keeping books in libraries, as projects like the University of Virginia’s Book Traces and the Oxford University Marginalia group demonstrate. While

the apocryphal collegiate tradition of having sex in the stacks figures rows of books as abandoned labyrinths, these projects cast them as sites for archaeological digs.

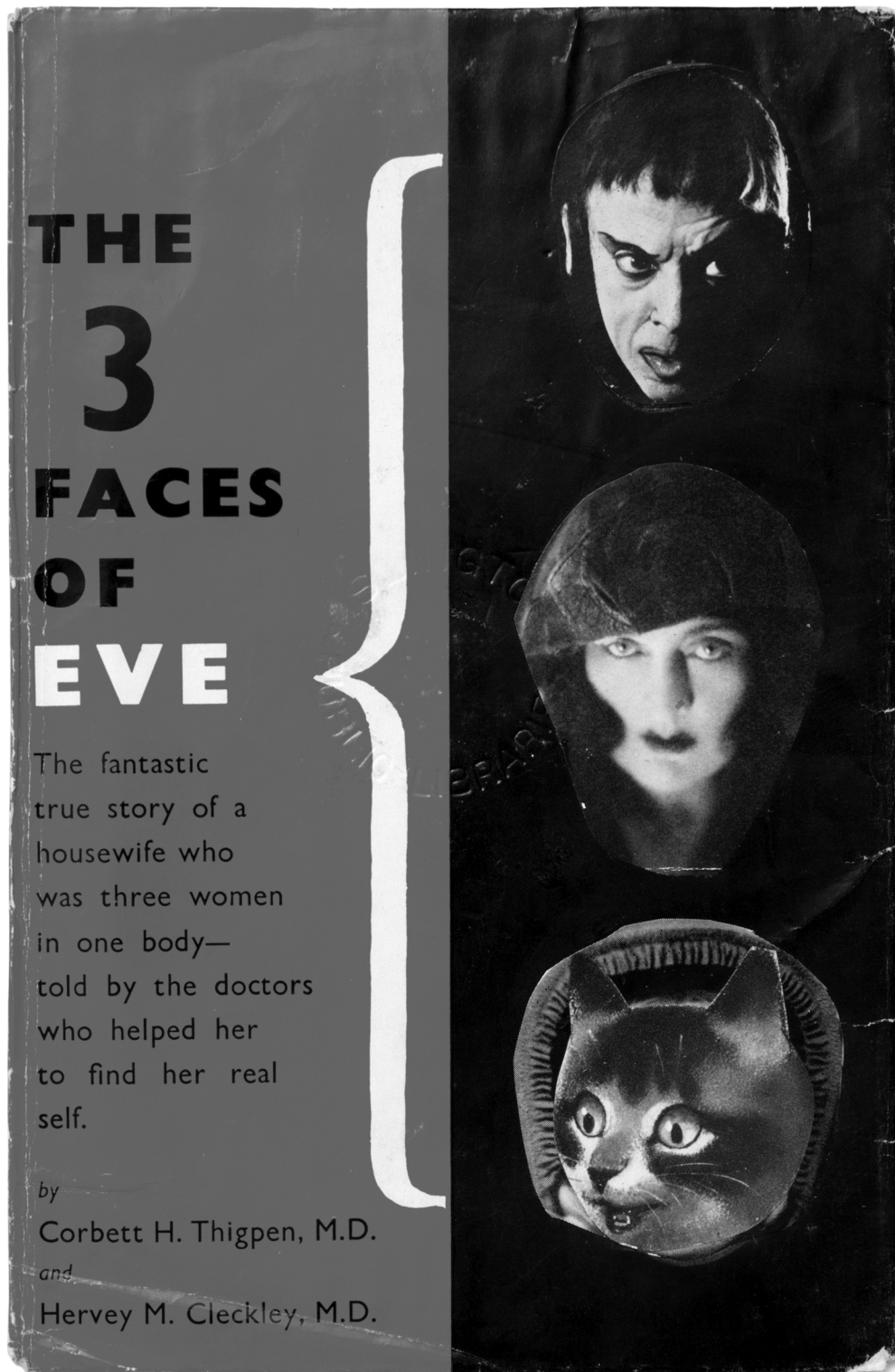
Theater scholars have long theorized performance as “the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward,” as Peggy Phelan writes.<sup>108</sup> The title of her canonical text, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, reads like the yang to the yin of William Sherman’s *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England*. Book historians have become specialists in evidence that marks affective experiences shared by a limited number of people in a communal space, albeit at different times. The end result of marginalia projects isn’t to show differences between books, but differences between readers’ experiences of them, whether marked or not. In this way, book history moves ever closer toward theater and performance theories of liveness. Performance scholars could meet book historians halfway by thinking even more about how print literally and metaphorically conditions shared experiences of theater, whether looking at how print crosses the stage as props, or circulates around it as tickets, playbills, posters, and souvenirs. Such an approach would begin to answer Lisa Gitelman’s call to shift from a study of print culture to one of media history, since, as Orton showed, Mrs. Grundy and Bill Stickers are as media-savvy as they are persistent.<sup>109</sup>





**Figure 1.** New faces have been added to the jacket of Katherine Garvin, *The Great Tudors* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1956): Alfred Lunt as the lead role in *Clarence*, as David Peel in *Robert E. Lee*, and as Juvan in *Goat Song*, which have all been removed from George Freedley, *The Lunts* (London: Rockliff, 1957); Roger Livesey as Falstaff in *The Merry Wives*

*of Windsor*, which has been removed from J.C. Trewin, *Alec Clunes* (London: Rockliff, 1958); along with the army officer T.E. Lawrence, a monkey, and a skeleton. Identifications by Ilsa Colsell. Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.



**Figure 2.** More new faces have been added to the jacket of Corbett H. Thigpen and Hervey M. Cleckley, *The Three Faces of Eve* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1957): Robert Helpmann as *Richard III*, cut from Katherine Sorley Walker, *Robert Helpmann* (London: Rockliff, 1957); Sybil Thorndike as Carmen in *G.H.Q. Love*, and a cat's face pasted over Thorndike as

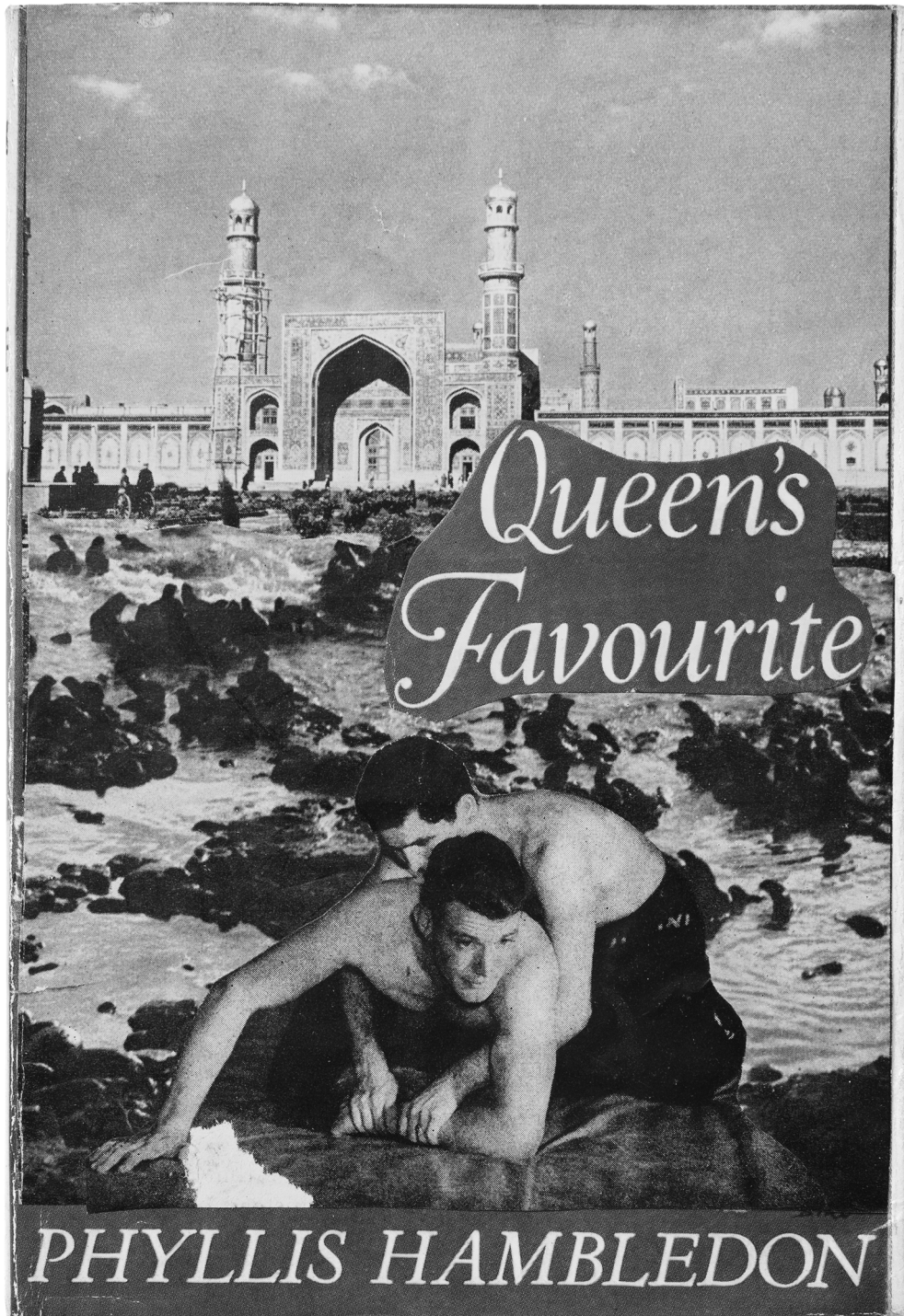
Barbara Undershaft in *Major Barbara*, with both Thorndike images cut from J.C. Trewin, *Sybil Thorndike* (London: Rockliff, 1955). Identifications by Ilsa Colsell. Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.



**Figure 3.** The jacket of William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. M.R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1958), has been pasted over with Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (c. 1510) as Desdemona, and



Othello played by St. Maurice from Matthias Grünewald's *The Meeting of St. Erasmus and St. Maurice* (c. 1524). Identifications by Ilsa Colsell. Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.



**Figure 4.** The jacket of Phyllis Hambledon, *Queen's Favourite* (London: Ward Lock, 1960), has been pasted over with two men wrestling, a military beach landing, and the Friday Mosque of Herat. Identifications by Ilsa Colsell. Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.







**Figures 5 and 6.** Orton and Halliwell's flat interior, 1962. Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.

Collins Guide to

# ROSES



by  
BERTRAM  
PARK

**Figure 7.** A monkey's face has been pasted onto the cover of Bertram Park, *Collins Guide to Roses* (London: Collins, 1956). Courtesy of Islington Local History Centre.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Annie Mole, "Walking May be Quicker Tube Poster," *Flickr*, May 8, 2012, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/anniemole/7158242416/>; James Barrass-Banks, "Thames Water—officially NOT an Olympic sponsor," August 28, 2012, <https://jamesbarrassbanks.wordpress.com/2012/08/28/thames-water-officially-not-an-olympic-sponsor/>; Symon M. Reynolds, "British Airways Shout At The TV Loud Enough And They'll Hear You Advert The Tube Advert Paralympics London Sept 2012," *Flickr*, September 2, 2012, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/symonmreynolds/7912134854/>.

<sup>2</sup> Will Davies, "How to Restore Pricelessness," *Potlatch*, April 15, 2012, <http://potlatch.typepad.com/weblog/2012/04/restoringpricelessnes.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all posters from The National Archives, *Keep Britain Tidy: And Other Posters from the Nanny State*, ed. Hester Vaizey (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014). Ministry of Health, "Coughs And Sneezes Spread Diseases," c. 1950s, INF 13/189/5; Royston Cooper, "Keep Britain Tidy," 1965, INF 13/222/3; Reginald Mount, "Staggered Holidays Help Everybody," c. 1950s, INF 13/233/11.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Flood, *British Posters: Advertising, Art & Activism* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012), 14; Stanley Cohen, "1. Property Destruction: Motives and Meanings," in *Vandalism*, ed. Colin Ward (London: Architectural Press, 1974), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Sandra Laville and Ben Quinn with Esther Addley, "Graffiti Artist Who Worked for Adidas Is Banned from Olympic Games Venues," *Guardian*, 18 July 2012.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the viral “Cassetteboy—Cameron’s Conference Rap,” YouTube video, 1:52, posted by “cassetteboy,” October 1, 2014,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0YBumQHPAeU>. For more on Sicilian graffiti, see Kristina Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 98–100.

<sup>7</sup> Maurice Rickards and Michael Twyman, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Ephemera: A Guide to the Fragmentary Documents of Everyday Life for the Collector, Curator, and Historian* (New York: Routledge, 2000), s.v. “poster”; Flood, *British Posters*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> “Quoodle” (Iain Macleod), “Spectator’s Notebook,” *Spectator*, 3 December 1965.

<sup>9</sup> Michael M. Grynbaum, “Bloomberg Plans a Ban on Large Sugared Drinks,” *New York Times*, 30 May 2012; Eric Boehm, “Nanny-Stater of the Week: NY Lawmaker Wants to Ban Photos with Tigers,” *Watchdog.org*, 27 June 2014, <http://watchdog.org/156877/nanny-week-tiger-new-york/>.

<sup>10</sup> This last example from Cohen, “1. Property Destruction,” 44.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Knuth, *Burning Books and Leveling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006), 6; Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of “The Pilgrim’s Progress”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 143.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Bryden, “On the Orton Offensive,” *Observer*, 2 October 1966; “Ortonesque, Adj.,” *OED*.

<sup>13</sup> Hugh Saker, “The Gorilla in The Roses,” *Daily Mirror*, 16 May 1962.

<sup>14</sup> All vandalism from Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, 1959–62, GB 1032 S/ORT/1, Islington Local History Centre. “Williams, Emlyn. The collected plays of Emlyn Williams (Heinemann, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/38.

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<sup>15</sup> “Plagemann, Bentz. Steel cocoon (Secker and Warberg, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/13; “Sayers, Dorothy L. Clouds of witness (Gollancz, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/15.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in John Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 127. Orton never referred to Halliwell in interviews. For the sake of simplicity, this essay assumes that Orton and Halliwell were aligned in their biblio-vandalism. Halliwell went on to make collaged posters for Orton’s plays.

<sup>17</sup> “Formative Prison,” *Evening Standard*, 3 October 1966; William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Joe Orton, interview by Giles Gordon, *Transatlantic Review* 24 (Spring 1967): 97–98.

<sup>19</sup> Alistair Black, “The People’s University: Models of Public Library History,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Alistair Black and Peter Hoare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3:28; Arthur Marwick, *British Society Since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2003), 136.

<sup>20</sup> James D. Stewart, “The London Borough Libraries,” in *The Libraries of London*, eds. Raymond Irwin and Ronald Staveley (London: Library Association, 1961), 115–21.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Kelly, *A History of Public Libraries in Great Britain, 1845–1975* (London: Library Association, 1977), 383.

<sup>23</sup> Reginald Northwood, *Library Administration* (London: Crosby Lockwood & Son, 1962), 66.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in R.C. Bengel, “Book Selection,” in *Five Years’ Work In Librarianship, 1951–1955*, ed. P.H. Sewell (London: Library Association, 1958), 189; Janice A. Radway, *Reading*

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*the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in O.S. Tomlinson, “Urban Libraries,” in *Five Years’ Work In Librarianship, 1956–1960*, ed. P.H. Sewell (London: Library Association, 1963), 152.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon interview, 98.

<sup>27</sup> Sherman, *Used Books*, 151–78.

<sup>28</sup> George Burchett, *Memoirs of a Tattooist: From the Notes, Diaries, and Letters of the Late “King of Tattooists,” George Burchett* (London: Crown Publishers, 1958), 64.

<sup>29</sup> Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears*, 95.

<sup>30</sup> “Trewin, J.C. Sybil Thorndike (Rockliff, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/36; “Trewin, J.C. Alec Clunes (Rockliff, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/35.

<sup>31</sup> “Walker, Kathrine Sorley. Robert Helpmann (Rockliff, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/37.

<sup>32</sup> “Garvin, Katherine (ed). *The Great Tudors* (Eyre and Spottiswood, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/7.

<sup>33</sup> “Thigpen, Corbet H and Cleckley, Hervery M. *The Three Faces of Eve* (Secker and Warberg, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/34.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Pepper, “Storehouses of Knowledge: The Free Library Movement and the Birth of Modern Library Architecture,” in *Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain*, ed. Black and Hoare, 3:591; Black, “People’s University,” 3:32.

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of graffiti and textual consciousness, see Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 122–50.

<sup>36</sup> That bookshop is Gay’s the Word, established in 1979. For a history of gay library activity in the United States, see James Vinson Carmichael, ed., *Daring to Find Our Names: The Search for Lesbian Library History* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1998).

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<sup>37</sup> “Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (Gollancz, 1950s),” GB 1032 S/ORT/1/1/15.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Connell, “A Successful Prosecution,” *Library Association Record*, March 1963, 103–5.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon interview, 99.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in “Ruined Art Books,” *North London Press*, 18 May 1962, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in James Kidd, “The Life and Crimes of a Great Playwright,” *Independent*, 25 January 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Stephen Colclough, ““Miss Cathy’s riven th’ back off “Th’ Helmet uh Salvation””,” in *Book Destruction from the Medieval to the Contemporary*, ed. Gill Partington and Adam Smyth (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 149.

<sup>43</sup> Anthony Bale, “Belligerent Literacy, Bookplates and Graffiti: Dorothy Helbarton’s Book,” in *Book Destruction*, ed. Partington and Smyth, 103–4.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears*, 86. Naoko Yajima observes that although no similar cases occurred in Britain, in America a man who damaged a book on communism worth \$500 (roughly equivalent to Orton and Halliwell’s damage) received just ten days imprisonment. Naoko Yajima, “The Summary of Joe Orton: Attack Against Books/Attack Against Society,” *Libraries of the Present Day* 45, No. 2 (2007).

<sup>45</sup> For complete descriptions of the surviving alterations to which I owe many identifications, see Ilsa Colsell, *Malicious Gossip: The Defaced Library Books of Kenneth Halliwell and Joe Orton* (London: Donlon Books, 2013), 150–54.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Cochran, *The Burning of Byron’s Memoirs: New and Unpublished Essays and Papers* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 3; Jonathan Rose, *The Holocaust and the Book: Destruction and Preservation* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 7; Julie A.E. Curtis, *Manuscripts Don’t Burn: Mikhail Bulgakov, a Life in Letters and Diaries* (New York: Overlook Press, 1992); Claire Squires, “Literary

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Prizes,” *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Volume 4: Professionalism and Diversity 1880–2000*, eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 264; quoted in Joseph Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 186.

<sup>47</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 137.

<sup>48</sup> Peter Fryer, *Mrs Grundy: Studies in English Prudery* (New York: London House & Maxwell, 1963), 18–19.

<sup>49</sup> Oscar Wilde, “Mr. Wilde’s Bad Case,” in *Oscar Wilde: Art and Morality*, ed. Christopher Millard (London: J. Jacobs, 1908), 25.

<sup>50</sup> Orton read Wilde in childhood. Lahr describes how Orton used to read *Earnest* to his younger sister, Leonie: “She can still see him looking up from the play with an eyebrow arched in mock astonishment to exclaim in a fluting voice: ‘A handbag!’” Lahr, *Prick Up Your Ears*, 74.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Lahr, *Prick up your Ears*, 152.

<sup>52</sup> Nicholas Frankel argues that Wilde’s decorated books enact “contradictions” that resemble the “paradoxical forms running through them,” and this is a useful paradigm for approaching Orton’s own books and plays. Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde’s Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>53</sup> Joe Orton, *Loot*, in *The Complete Plays* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), 250; Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 297.

<sup>54</sup> Orton, *Loot*, 235; Joe Orton, *What the Butler Saw*, in *Complete Plays*, 440–41.

<sup>55</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 146.

<sup>56</sup> Orton, *Loot*, 246.

<sup>57</sup> Orton, *Butler*, 382.



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<sup>58</sup> Fryer, *Mrs Grundy*, 17–21.

<sup>59</sup> H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 192–93; Nakul Kırşna, Oxford University Marginalia Facebook Public Group, December 21, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/500979143259881/>.

<sup>60</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 152.

<sup>61</sup> Dominic Shellard, Steve Nicholson, and Miriam Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets....: A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: British Library, 2004), 162.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions: The Censoring of the English Stage, 1901–1968* (London: Methuen, 2000), 174.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions*, 175.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in De Jongh, *Politics, Prudery & Perversions*, 121.

<sup>65</sup> See Steve Nicholson, *The Censorship of British Drama, 1900–1968, Volume 4: The Sixties* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Orton invented Edna in the late 1950s to play pranks against Littlewoods, Smedley, the National Trade Press, a reverend, and the Ritz. For all her letters, see Joe Orton, *The Orton Diaries: Including the Correspondence of Edna Welthorpe and Others*, ed. John Lahr (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 271–89.

<sup>67</sup> Terence Rattigan, *The Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), vii.

<sup>68</sup> Orton, *Orton Diaries*, 289.

<sup>69</sup> Like the Gray Lady, Auntie Beeb was old before she was old media. “Auntie” was increasingly used in the 1950s to contrast BBC with the much brasher ITV. “Beeb” was added in the 1970s by Peter Sellers (“Beeb Beeb Ceeb”) and Kenny Everett (“Auntie Beeb”). Caroline Hodgson, *For the Love of Radio 4: An Unofficial Companion* (Chichester: Summersdale Publishers, 2014), 208–9.

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<sup>70</sup> Alan Travis, *Bound and Gagged: A Secret History of Obscenity in Britain* (London: Profile Books, 2001), 221.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Marian Sawer, "Gender, Metaphor and the State," *Feminist Review*, no. 52 (April 1, 1996): 124.

<sup>72</sup> "Paternalism, N.," *OED*.

<sup>73</sup> Julian Le Grand and Bill New, *Government Paternalism: Nanny State or Helpful Friend?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 105.

<sup>74</sup> Alex Comfort, *Sex in Society* (London: Duckworth, 1963), 53.

<sup>75</sup> Colin Ward, "Introduction," in *Vandalism*, ed. Ward, 13.

<sup>76</sup> Cohen, "Property Destruction," 33–34.

<sup>77</sup> Robert Douglas-Fairhurst and Seamus Perry, *Tennyson Among the Poets: Bicentenary Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xxxviii.

<sup>78</sup> The billsticker charged Mr. Powell with assault. The magistrates differed as to whether Mr. Powell should pay a fine for the broken sticks; he decided to do so, though one of the magistrates warned the billsticker: "Don't come near me, young gentleman, or I'll break all the bones in your skin." "Police," *Times*, 7 May 1832.

<sup>79</sup> *The Original: A New Miscellany of Humour, Literature, and the Fine Arts* (London: G. Cowie, 1832), 174.

<sup>80</sup> "Andrew Mullins," *Sketches by Seymour* (London: Thomas Fry, 1836), Plate 2.

<sup>81</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), 114.

<sup>82</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *The Death of William Posters* (London: W. H. Allen, 1965).

<sup>83</sup> Flood, *British Posters*, 102.

<sup>84</sup> Marwick, *British Society*, 124.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1957), 225.

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<sup>86</sup> Joe Orton, *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, in *Complete Plays*, 119.

<sup>87</sup> Orton, *Loot*, 207.

<sup>88</sup> Orton, *Butler*, 375.

<sup>89</sup> Orton, *Loot*, 274.

<sup>90</sup> Orton, *Sloane*, 146.

<sup>91</sup> Though not in popular music. Sean Street, *A Concise History of British Radio, 1922-2002* (Tiverton: Kelly Publications, 2002), 89–90.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Flood, *British Posters*, 13.

<sup>93</sup> *Week's Good Cause* was a BBC charity appeals program first broadcast on January 24, 1926. It is the longest-run program in the history of British radio. Street, *British Radio*, 155.

<sup>94</sup> “Go Easy With Bread,” Mid-1940s, INF 13/286/2; Scottish Home and Health Department, “Four Rules For A Happy Smile,” 1960s, INF 13/178/6; Ministry of Labour and National Service and Board of Trade, “Let’s Get Spinning, Let’s Get Weaving,” c. late 1940s, INF 13/134/7; “Buy British Goods,” c. 1968, EXT 1/123/15; Pieter Huveneers, “Whatever Else You May Have,” Mid-1940s, NSC 25/381.

<sup>95</sup> “Suspicious? Call The Police,” INF 13/207/1.

<sup>96</sup> Flood, *British Posters*, 30.

<sup>97</sup> Flood, *British Posters*, 14–16.

<sup>98</sup> See Ray Clark, *The Ship that Rocked the World* (Stroud: History Press, 2014).

<sup>99</sup> Orton, *Butler*, 447.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Harris, “Defacing the Cenotaph, Urinating on Churchill ... How Young Thugs at Student Protest Broke Every Taboo,” *Daily Mail*, 10 December 2010; Hilary Rose, “The May Day Protest in Parliament Square,” *Times*, 5 September 2009; Dalya Alberge, “How Vandals Have Made Their Mark on History,” *Times*, 4 July 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Orton, *Loot*, 247.

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<sup>102</sup> Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>103</sup> Orton, *Sloane*, 133.

<sup>104</sup> Orton, *Butler*, 367.

<sup>105</sup> Orton, *Sloane*, 136.

<sup>106</sup> For two examples, see “Loud Eating in the Library!,” YouTube video, 4:26, posted by “JStuStudios,” September 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPh9JZlVUK0>; “Prangstgrup Powerbook Start up Sound Prank!!,” YouTube video, 2:32, posted by “Prangstgrup,” Aug. 5, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt1bgsvsWms>.

<sup>107</sup> Erik Piepenburg, “Theaters Struggle With Patrons’ Phone Use During Shows,” *New York Times*, 10 July 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 149.

<sup>109</sup> Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 9.